

**State Board of Education
Transformation Discussion with Vermont Principals
November 20, 2007**

Principals broke into four groups to respond to three questions, facilitated by Department staff.

1. As you envision a transformed learning environment for the students of Vermont what current practices should be included in a transformed education system that would best serve the needs of all students?

- Maintaining and supporting regional and career tech ed system
- Cost effective. I've been both student, teacher and director of Tech ctr.
- Why was concept developed? Regional center approach was developed because there wasn't a critical mass of students locally to support expensive programs. Same factors still in play. Economy of scale issues.
- How does transportation issue impact? Not an issue for Hartford Ctr.
- Protect 'carrots vs. sticks' approach to help schools within a region to work together. Great cooperation in her region re: calendar, testing, etc. State calendar is not helping. It's definitely a stick. Essex consolidation vote went down – that was too bad. It's heartening to have folks come together to work things out.
- Are there other 'carrot' possibilities?
- Needs to be some incentives.
- Should not be a financial disincentive to send a student to the center
- Flexibility is a carrot – the statewide calendar even runs contrary to the Transformation document. There are pockets of excellence around the state.
- CVU – great senior challenge
- Mt Abe – accelerating students?
- Essex HS – developing leadership in students 'TAP' program
- People, flexibility, leadership in every context: building, community and central office. Look at places of excellence, consider proposed change and consider how proposed changes would impact these sites. Challenge to leadership is which movements to pay attention to
- Financial incentives would be good.
- \$ follows student to the tech ctr so it's a negative impact on the HS school.
- Principals and Tech Directors do want to support each other but they are in a position to compete for student/dollars.
- Has been in state 7 yrs and that's one of the first things she heard- HS and Tech Ctr compete for students & \$
- Hands on learning is important to protect. In tech ctr there is a lot of hands on...it's putting academics into practice.
- Some places where tech ed can happen in regular HS/comprehensive HS and you'd want to protect those. HS is trying to run some sort of program for kids who don't leave. We don't have auto tech, wood, etc.
- When practical arts requirement was taken away, those programs were eliminated
- Some have been replaced by digital networking ...this is expensive too.
- We'll become like a liberal arts school instead of having the broad program we have. We get kids from everywhere and prepare them for everything. How do we define

- preparing them for the ‘next step’. The ‘best’ HS in country have a very narrow mission. (Phillips Exeter etc) College prep. Need to protect our broader mission.
- We keep trying to find more options for kids
 - We have tech area, pre-law, medical, theater, printing – mass media. So it’s not just traditional tech areas. Is the mission is everyone going to college? We send as many kids to college as surrounding HS. Would like to see HS incorporate some the applied learning that tech ctr use.
 - Gave example of a HS that used skills to solve community wetlands problem as example of applied learning.
 - It’s huge to describe current practices. Caring and supportive relationships – these are things we are doing. Much of what’s in this document already exist. It’s a huge task to set these out. Science class is assessing soil on schools building sites...many, many excellent current practices
 - Let’s not forget HSOM document. Every HS was visited, those best practices were identified on some data base somewhere, let’s not lose that. NEASC has that info too.
 - VYCC, AP classes, classes online. We don’t necessarily have individual learning plans, but we’re doing a lot of this.
 - We’re hearing that’s logistically impossible
 - We’re doing it after a fashion, not regularly scheduled meetings and regular review but we are trying to meet ind student needs.
 - We’re in the process of pulling together info from visits
 - We were visited last fall and we never got a report
 - Would like it in the law that a student is still a student until they get a diploma...so there’s no top off....
 - Every year I’ve heard of students who are scheduled to graduate and want to take courses at tech center but don’t have time. Kids are willing to fail a class on purpose to be able to stay.
 - Let’s talk about current practices we should drop: Carnigie units
 - I already dropped them
 - School day parameters can’t run program during summer, after school, etc or we have to pay for them. FTE for tech and ADM for HS. Another challenge for us
 - Statewide assmt system should align with student centered plans. Should be assessing student on their individual plan.
 - Flexibility. Schools have become locked in by rules like ADM
 - Student feedback should not get lost from previous session. There are some rules on the books about flexible plans, but we do force a lot of kids to do stuff they hate...PE. Article about Winooski was really sharp. I can tell you about 6 kids who were either on medication or were depressed and when they got out of school, they were fine.
 - Advisory/TA system. It is vital. Each student has relationship with an adult and the opportunity to meet students from other grade levels; role of T.A. helps students develop personal learning plans
 - Integrated connected curriculum
 - 21st Century Skills-many embedded in GEs
 - Block schedule—longer chunks of time for instruction so that kids really become engaged
 - Emphasis more on the liberal arts—promotes students understanding of all subjects
 - Continue to see the value in PE and the arts

- Data demonstrates that Vermont's small class size is the reason we do so well
- Common planning time for teachers at each of the grade levels
- Don't give up on what's working
- Responsive Classroom—builds a sense of community within the classroom; really enters into all facets of the school system—very influential in the way business is done in the school. Very positive.
- Giving teachers time to work together to meet the needs of the students. Connection between teachers help the teachers know what the students need across grades. Teachers need time and training before implementation in the classroom.
- What needs time in one school might not be the same thing in another classroom. PD time is set by individual schools. Concern that if transformation document forms same needs for schools; schools would have to use their time and PD on the same subjects and issues. Each school needs PD in different things. Do not want to lose this option of dealing with different things.
- Teacher leaders had time and money to implement outstanding writing/reading program. They are trying to do the same thing in their math program.
- Many schools are the centers of communities – do not want to see schools not made “one size fits all”. School size keeps students/communities safe. Do not want to lose the unique identity of community schools.
- Curriculum framework – good—stable – making changes to that is difficult. Let them work from the curriculum framework—when it changes, the teachers cannot keep up. Just learn to use it and it changes again. There is concern about changing it.
- Having the time to get good at something before the rules change is very difficult. Principals do not want to start over, using best practices and what works. They do not want to see the state start over with curriculum frameworks. They want to keep the flexibility of using what works for their schools. They do not want to see us start over.
- Six important words in document: Including the necessary structure and resources to implement any new program. Without structure and resources, it will be a passing thing. They want to see a stable curriculum.
- Federal “What Works” website resource is very helpful.
- Do we have the time to teach teachers how really teach. We do not want to make the teachers figure out “what” and be able to concentrate on “how.”
- “If it ain't broke, don't fix it” There are some schools that need improvement, but when a school is doing well with their programs, they do not want to see things changed. “A good teacher will do a good job given the time to do it”.
- They want the DOE to stop re-inventing the wheel.
- Student teaching/internship is not enough. They need another year of paid internship. They cannot hire someone out of college. The student teachers need to know what they are doing before they start teaching at a school. Also goes for school administrators. They need better ways to learn what they need to.
- Hard to go to innovative ideas with budget cuts.
- Do we want to make changes from within or let the Legislature make changes because of problems?
- Because of financial constraints, we are not bringing the kids up to the technology they need. Even within this state, there are many micro-cultures.

- What we want for students: critical thinkers, to be literate, character, numeracy, act morally responsible, to be self confident, technologically efficient. They can do the how, state should say what the student needs to be able to do; they, the principals and schools, will figure out how to get it done.
- They want the kids to enjoy learning.
- Two biggest problems for Vermont education: weakness of tax base; morality. Too many non-educational tasks for principals. Demands from state and federal government—Dept is in enforcement-mode. Coming up with solutions for sped issues would be more helpful so it would be a money saver to the schools and they would not live in fear of due process. Schools are also serving more as parents. Administrators are given too many surveys. Need to replace one with another one; not just adding another one.
- One district feels constantly under pressure during budget season. Distract from their job of teaching. Also they sometimes feel there are too many tests.
- We should look at what we want education to look like—not what it will cost.. That will come later. First, we have to decide what we want things to look like and then address what things will cost.
- Two questions/issues: secondary slant to document-how much is a 6 or 7 year old will be involved in their ILP. Second is generality. Many of the points are platitudes. Last is cost for technology.
- Technology-everything is changing.
- MS interdisciplinary team model: teacher advisory done well
- Responsive Classroom teaching led to change in elementary schools; Developmental Design training for teachers at MS (HS students have had 11 years of these systems); creates smoother transitions to next level; data (suspension, conflict, and dropout rates, etc) supports that these initiatives are working – vertical coherence
- Building a community in the school
- HS – student-led mentoring (upper-class students work with ninth graders)
- Use of writing and math portfolios as instructional tools
- Momentum for Understanding by Design as valuable instructional tools; lots of money invested
- Preschool program in place
- Traditional Jr High teachers not equipped to deal with TA; parents and students are pushing Developmental Design; kids are talking about the morning meeting, academic choice, taught routines and rituals related to rules (common language across school/parents)
- Embedded staff development (ex. Bridging Project, literacy specialist in classrooms, “Behind the Glass” session, rotating math mentors for modeling and coaching, learning from each other)
- Teaching All Secondary Students – caused profound shift in teaching
- District-wide curriculum committee to align schools with each other and standards; teacher participation
- Multiple Pathways (People’s Academy) as individualized study program for some kids evolved into TA advisory program; community-based learning; trying to meet the needs of all kids. PLP is standards-based; application but open to anyone (mostly for parent communication and involvement); pull in community; most students have a combination of academic courses and individual project, depending on their needs

- People's has held training for Responsive Classroom
- (Statewide) EST for all students (weekly model to know which kids are falling through the cracks; don't always know what to do)
- Role of principal in PLCs? Have to make it happen; sometimes hung up with contractual issues; time is a huge issue
- Release time (TASS?) once a month last year; kept for this year because teachers found it so valuable; uninterrupted, regularly scheduled time
- Early morning/late start release time easier for MS/HS
- Can be disconnect between SB + superintendent and teachers' perceived needs
- SU-wide, stratified mentoring system for teachers (Montpelier, Essex, People's); train teachers to be mentors, prepared by topics of discussion (ex. parent conferences). Hurdle in small districts: not enough available teachers in the new building, more new teachers
- Look internally for providers of professional development (IT personnel)
- Preschool for ALL 4-year-olds
- MS interdisciplinary curricula/programs
- Responsive Classroom (elementary) + Developmental Design (MS) create supportive atmosphere for students
- Teaching All Secondary Students
- Embedded professional development/early release time
- Pre-school
- Multiple Pathways; PLP
- Mentoring for new teachers, in-coming ninth graders
- NOTE: All of these above were evident in only some schools/districts.

2. As you envision a transformed learning environment for the students of Vermont what new practices should be included?

- Starting at least at grade 9 have each student learn about many different careers. They don't know enough to pursue interests. Worked with one school in another state that had a class that was career awareness, and after that every class (Math, science, LA) explored 5 different career areas.
- Burlington HS does that
- Geography presents challenges re: community partnerships. ME initiative of putting laptops in all kids hands, there are huge \$\$ issues.
- Are you wanting to see more access to tech
- If money came with it.
- We have to set money aside for now. In ME was a state action that made that happen and sustained it. What are the pieces that you'd like to see more available to kids. They are monitoring this and its adoption by teachers.
- Money piece is big...if we can set it aside...I can see us provide career guidance coordinators who could work with HS guidance which is overburdened. To think that tech ctr could be purveyors of career awareness type opportunities and would build better relationships with HS. Someone who could also help locate, setup workplace learning plans. HS needs more resources to help them pursue this mission...what's good for kids.
- In VA there are 2 dozen online courses. Our state DOE should do this for our rural students...Chinese. Etc. Why not charge DOE with this?

- In Utah, they have a huge online list of courses that anyone in the state can take. These are all HS courses.
- Had a regional board meeting...emerging language is Asian culture...we may offer it at the tech center so kids could come from all the HS so you'd get the critical mass. So looking at our tech ctr to get critical mass that you couldn't get in our HS
- 21st century skills, people don't believe we're doing this. Higher Ed is one of the reasons people don't believe us, due to the way they recruit, select what is valued (AP classes, etc)
- Let's have a REAL K-16 conversation...PR, hard facts about these 21st century skills. Every time someone talks about something exciting, I run it past the master contract and it goes out the window...Guidance is willing to offer evening hours...contract says 7 ½ contiguous hours...negotiation are salary benefits and everything else we don't get to. Administrators are not there.
- Flexibility is hampered by contract.
- Cooperative Ed coordinators...we've had lots of false starts. AS \$ went away so did positions. Idea of some kind of HS based community placement person. Internships are basically illegal. WE need a certification / person at this level. No incentive to go to tech ctr with requirements.
- Make senior year a year with options which could include a work based placement so they could get things they need like working skills...
- School within a school with 2 teacher mentors. Coursework was negotiated with teachers...Again flexibility so kids like school.
- This requires work with Higher Ed to understand and accept alternatives. Champlain College will not accept kids from Randolph tech ctr.
- The rigor is critical. Her son developed his own course, and this was the best learning experience for him
- Outside forces mitigate against any flexibility...NAEP, paperwork...because of rules schools are petrified.
- All sending schools have different grad requirements.
- Schools are not using competency based grad because of higher ed.
- Would like ind learning plan at 5th grade level, my daughter has no bigger idea about her education. He gets kids in his class who failed Language Arts 3 years of MS, fail the NECAP and show up for English 9. Behavior issues often determine placement, not competency.
- Ind learning plans can't be open choice but directing interests.
- Ind learning plans are underpinned with GLEs
- If we're going to stick with credit, we need Tech credit requirement (computer tech,) since we're requiring art, music, etc.
- If you want to add grad requirements, it must be available in a variety of ways...out in the community, in the evening, we need to be able to make it happen in a million ways.
- Need to get past master schedule
- Need to find ways for smaller schools to have more flexibility
- Design what each student wants to learn (tutors for each student)
- Need to find a balance/guidance/ framework within the school climate before you can give kids independence

- Need to have job shadowing (as early as 10th grade) opportunities available for those students who do not see college as their next step after high school (apprenticeship for students)
- Encourage students to see their next steps
- Need to have common planning time and sufficient staff to accommodate time away from teaching
- Need interdisciplinary learning; connected curriculum; team teaching
- Teacher needs to be more present in the document
- Need to use resources in the best way we can
- Need flexibility to accommodate individual students' needs
- Need to build business/school partnerships (different businesses create different opportunities for different students); businesses must be committed
- Recognize that community involvement is very important
- Need to look at the entire realm of students and the experiences that we can provide them—will take a plethora of businesses, opportunities, and experiences
- Dual enrollment
- Need flexibility when granting credit
- Need to explore more on-line courses, opportunities, “virtual high school”
- Look at Adult Basic Learning for high school diploma
- Need to give students bigger perspective on the world
- Need to explore specialist vs. generalist; think about the “global”
- Need more professional development for educators and the time for them to take advantage of it and then develop ways for them to apply it practically
- Need a lot of options for students and time for teachers to make connections
- Need to explore the different ways to demonstrate how students learn and what they are able to do
- At the state level, need to aid the public and legislators to understand that there are different ways to demonstrate accountability
- Need more opportunity to think “out of the box”
- Need to recognize and value the importance of student/teacher relationships
- Need to let go of “cookie cutter” standards; let students grow at their own pace but yet not losing sight of accountability
- Need to recognize that change needs to be incremental and that sustainable change takes time
- Grade expectations are too many; need to focus on what's important; classes focus on only some it.
- Documents are not in the way. It's the diversity of students and resources that get in the way.
- Alternative program for kids for whom the Responsive Classroom design is not working
- Teach children to be collaborative; what used to be taught at home is no longer taught at home; teachers need to be trained to teach social emotional skills (PD)
- Well-trained teachers who know what to do with assessment data
- Alternative program options needed early for engaging all students (beyond SPED)
- Student-centered learning environment
- Figure out how to add time for staff development: staff meeting time used as PLC

- Importance of collaboration – need to provide time; will statewide calendar facilitate this?
- Build in common planning time for MS teachers; common grade-level planning time at elementary
- Develop collaborative relationships with higher education and other professional development providers (VMI)
- Increased professional development with numbers of days set aside
- Teacher-driven, relevant professional development
- Build infrastructure for integration of technology and instruction/assessment data
- Need for library-media specialists but competing needs and limited dollars
- MUST: In-depth professional development in utilizing technology for teachers and administrators
- Involve kids in planning and suggestions for integration of technology (asking the wrong people); use kids as resources
- Principals need to redefine their roles and get into classrooms themselves – will help move principals forward with technology and instruction
- Teacher leadership: training programs for teachers internally (NWP, VMI, VMP)
- Using grants to develop internal leadership, coaching, action planning
- Strong leadership team (respected collegial group) that hears and acts on concerns of teachers (People's, Colchester); has input into in-service days
- New strategies for kids with social, behavioral, and emotional issues (most programs cost lots of money...); collaboration with local mental health facilities
- Prepare students for independent world of work
- Teachers are building modules of instruction on their website for parents to access
- Well-trained teachers in collaboration; use of assessment data; social/emotional skills, integration and utilization of technology
- Common planning time; collaboration; teacher-driven, relevant professional development
- Increased professional development with numbers of days set aside
- Re-definition of principal roles
- Library-media specialists
- Strong leadership team
- Strategies for addressing social/emotional issues of students

3. What questions does the document, *A Step toward the Transformation of Education in Vermont*, raise for you as an educator? A principal?

- Drop the other shoe. You obviously have some idea in mind. It's too far up, 50,000 foot level.
- There is no secret.
- We need to get down to 5,000 foot level. Let's go. We've been ready. We embraced HSOM.
- Another point about credit. Expand # of credits but reduced specific requirements. Let parents, students, board, etc decide
- Let kids who graduated come back to tech center to take courses.

- Must have flexibility to decide what the credits are...lifelong learners cause they opted into classes. Kids need to be able to drive this so we create classes kids want, not putting kids in classes they don't want.
- Engage vast majority of HS principals in this discussion. So many parameters on the job, it's very frustrating
- Great Resource to investigate: Michael Sullivan – why boys don't read. List on his website. Differences between how boys and girls learn.
- Are local expectations being developed; how does that fit it?
- How can we get beyond the constraints of a master schedule?
- How do we meet the needs of all students/ learners?
- Should the technical centers' offerings be extended to include other high school grades, not just juniors and seniors?
- How do we bring relevancy into the classroom? Then you can bring in the rigor and lastly, reflection.
- How do we look at the bigger picture given that we're mired in everyday functions of the classroom?
- How do we blend individualization and flexibility into the school system?
- How do we make it work for everyone?
- What is the role of public education in Vermont? How do you define it?
- What is the educator's essential responsibility?
- NEASC standards guide schools. State should look at this document and if appropriate, adopt it.
- It's about teachers and leaders. How do we craft the message in such a way that it impacts the educational community appropriately?
- What are the common threads that we can build on?
- What is essential and how do we fund it?
- How do we make the best use of the resources we have?
- Does document encourage/suggest what's been talked about?
- Is it inviolate to add days to the contract?
- How can we even out the inequities in technology across the state?
- How do we provide the structure for different kids doing different things?
- What might leadership look like in schools post-Transformation?
- What kinds of partnerships can we enter into with our state/community agencies? How do we create the effective partnerships that we need to integrate students who need special support and inclusion?
- How can we implement early interventions for students who need them?
- How can we create community partnerships?
- How can we re-structure the "credit" system for graduation?
- What is the real effect of HQT? How do we make HQT work for the Transformation?
- How do the SQS fit into the Transformation?
- How will we pay for the Transformation? What costs will we have flexibility around?
- Where is the money for technology hard/software and professional development?
- How do we create connections/engage with community members who do not have children in school (or who do but do not support their children's education)? How do we tap into the community resources?
- What do effective after-school programs look like?

- How can we ensure quality and equity in teacher preparation programs? (research base)